

## American Revolution

The American Revolution, the conflict by which the American colonists won their independence from Great Britain and created the United States of America, was an upheaval of profound significance in world history. It occurred in the second half of the 18th century, in an "Age of Democratic Revolution," when philosophers and political theorists in Europe were critically examining the institutions of their own societies and the notions that lay behind them. Yet the American Revolution first put to the test ideas and theories that had seldom if ever been worked out in practice in the Old World—separation of church and state, sovereignty of the people, written constitutions, and effective checks and balances in government.

A struggle to preserve and later to expand the dimensions of human freedom, the American Revolution was also an anticolonial movement, the first in modern history. Before then, countries had usually come into existence through evolutionary processes, the result of tradition and history, geography and circumstance. The United States, on the other hand, had a birth date, 1776; it was "the first new nation," a republic born in revolution and war, a pattern followed by scores of fledgling states since that time, especially in the so-called Third World areas of the globe since 1945.

For many nation-makers the American rebellion has been a relevant revolution, offering insights and parallels that have aided them in their quest for self-determination. The revolutionists of 1776 themselves accurately predicted that the American Revolution would inspire men elsewhere to secure freedom and national identity in their own lands. As Thomas Jefferson assured John Adams, "the Flames kindled on the fourth of July" had spread over too much of the globe ever to be extinguished by the forces of despotism and reaction.

### THE COLONIES IN 1763

No revolution, of course, can be fully exported. A vast array of factors that include the political and social backgrounds of a people will shape the precise course of any and all revolutions. So it was in America, where the colonists were not an alien people with a culture very different from that of the motherland. They were for the most part British in origin, English-speaking, Protestant, rural, and agrarian in their principal characteristics. They were proud of their Anglo-Saxon heritage and of the empire of which they were a part—proud, too, of the role they had played in helping to seize Canada and to crush French power in North America in the FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR (known as the SEVEN YEARS' WAR in Europe), which ended in 1763.

At that time the colonists gave little thought to cutting loose from their imperial moorings. They considered the British political system the best in Europe, noted for its equilibrium between King, Lords, and Commons assembled in Parliament. They imported British books, furniture, and clothing; wealthy planters and merchants imitated the manners of the English aristocracy. Even with the restrictions imposed on their external trade by the NAVIGATION ACTS—or perhaps because of them—they had prospered in their direct economic intercourse with Britain, the most industrialized country in Europe. Nor was their trade rigidly confined; they were also permitted to sell an assortment of valuable products such as grain, flour, and rice on non-British markets in the West Indies and in southern Europe.

In 1763 the colonists were an expanding and maturing people; their numbers had reached a million and a half, and they were doubling every quarter of a century—multiplying like rattlesnakes, as Benjamin Franklin said. If most provincials were sons of the soil, Americans could nonetheless boast of five urban centers, "cities in the wilderness"—Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Charleston, and Newport. The cities served as filters through which new ideas of the European Enlightenment entered the colonies, helping to generate an inquisitive spirit about humankind and the total environment. Newspapers and colleges in the cities and towns served as disseminators of the thought and culture of what was truly an Atlantic civilization. A new mobility, together with a receptivity to new ideas, was a hallmark of American society. It came about because of high wages, cheap land, and an absence of legal privilege. Americans were—except for their African slaves—one of the freest people in the world. Another sign of that freedom was their almost complete control over their internal political and domestic affairs, exercised largely through their popularly elected lower houses of assembly, which in turn served as nurturing ground for such future Revolutionary leaders as John ADAMS, John DICKINSON, Thomas JEFFERSON, and George WASHINGTON.

Although the colonists had reached a high level of maturity, there was not at mid-century a meaningful American nationalism. The life and institutions of the parent state continued to provide the central focus of colonial culture. The word American appeared infrequently; people were more likely to describe themselves as English or British, or as Virginians or Pennsylvanians. Nor did the provincials display a marked degree of intercolonial cooperation; their own rivalries and jealousies over boundaries, western land claims, and military contributions in the imperial

wars all tended to retard American national feeling, as may be seen in the rejection of the Plan of Union presented by Benjamin FRANKLIN to the ALBANY CONGRESS in 1754.

Nothing, however, unites a people like a commonly perceived threat to their way of life; and after 1763 the colonists felt endangered within the empire. There is a real irony in the way the American Revolution began, for the very elements that had wedded the colonists to the mother country—especially their political and economic freedoms—were viewed in London as signs that Britain had lost control of its transatlantic dominions, that the colonists were fast heading down the road to full autonomy or absolute independence. Those sentiments, growing steadily in the 18th century, crystallized during the French and Indian War when British officials complained that Americans cooperated poorly in raising men and supplies and in providing quarters for British troops, to say nothing of trading illegally with the enemy and generating friction with western Indians over land and trade goods.

Whatever the truth of these charges—and they were partly true, if exaggerated—it was not unreasonable after 1763 for Britain to ask more of its prosperous dependencies. Britain's heavy national debt and concurrent tax burdens stemmed partly at least from a series of 18th-century wars that were fought to some extent for the defense of the colonies. Nor was it wrong to argue that a measure of reorganization in American administration would lead to greater economy and efficiency in imperial management. But Britain embarked upon this course with a lack of sensitivity, ignoring the concerns of its maturing subjects, who were scarcely the children they had once been.

In short, Britain's state of mind (meaning that of its rulers and the parliamentary majority) corresponded to its lofty status as the superpower of Europe in 1763. It was said that the Pax Romana would pale in comparison with the Pax Britannica, which would bring a "prosperity and glory unknown to any former age." Britain no longer felt a need for its former allies in Europe. For what nation could now threaten it? It no longer required the goodwill of its colonies, for France had ceased to be a threat to the thirteen colonies, whose men and other resources—although Britain scarcely admitted it—had in fact aided the British victory in 1763.

Britain's was a mentality unable to appreciate the aims and aspirations of its colonial people. Superpowers, all too often, are not much given to introspection, to questioning their values and assumptions. And it had been a long time since the British themselves had felt their liberties threatened, either by a foreign danger or by internal menace from a tyrannical ruler. Thus, when Britain adopted a new imperial program, the colonists were never meaningfully consulted. Furthermore, Britain's tactics could hardly avoid arousing the Americans. Having left the colonies virtually alone for decades with a de facto attitude of "salutary neglect," the London government now attempted too much too quickly.

## THE GROWING FERMENT

Even before the termination of the French and Indian War, visible indications had appeared of a new direction in colonial affairs. Beginning in 1759, small-scale disputes broke out between Britain and the colonies over disallowance of measures passed by the popular assemblies, over writs of assistance empowering the royal customs officials to break into homes and stores, and over judicial tenure in the colonial courts. Subsequent decisions made in London forbade "for the time being" western settlement beyond the Appalachian divide (the Proclamation of 1763), eliminated provincial paper currency as legal tender, bolstered the customs department, and enlarged the authority of the vice-admiralty courts in relation to enforcement of the Navigation Acts.

### Taxation Without Representation

When these unpopular measures were followed almost immediately by Parliament's placing taxes on Americans for the first time in their history, the result was an explosion that shook the empire to its foundations. George GRENVILLE, chief minister from 1763 to 1765, did not father the idea of American taxation; it had been "in the air" for several years. But it was he who pushed the controversial bills through Parliament in 1764 and 1765. The Sugar Act of 1764, actually a downward revision of an earlier Molasses Act, cut the duty on imported foreign molasses from sixpence to threepence a gallon; but it was to be vigorously enforced, and it was now called a revenue measure rather than a law designed merely to regulate trade. The next year Grenville secured passage of the so-called STAMP ACT, placing taxes on all legal documents and on newspapers, almanacs, and other items. Soon afterward came a third law, the Quartering Act, a form of indirect taxation that required American assemblies to provide British troops passing through their colonies with temporary housing and an assortment of provisions.

"Taxation without representation" was the central issue in the imperial rupture. It raised a fundamental question concerning the limits of parliamentary power that was debated throughout the dozen or so years before the declaration of American independence. Although Americans complained about the stream of British acts and

regulations after 1759, they now agreed that the constitutional issue of taxation posed the gravest threat of all to their freedom as individuals. If it was legal to take a man's property without his consent, as the philosopher John LOCKE wrote in defense of the GLORIOUS REVOLUTION of 1688 in England, then a man could scarcely have any liberty remaining, since property gave one a stake in society and enabled one to vote. Americans felt confident that Locke would have approved when they wrote in almost countless documents and petitions that Englishmen—in England, in Virginia, or anywhere else—could be taxed only by their own directly elected representatives.

When Parliament retreated in 1766, reducing the Sugar Act to the level of a trade duty and repealing the Stamp Act, it was responding to retaliatory colonial boycotts on British trade goods, not to the justness of American constitutional pronouncements. In 1767, Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend persuaded a Parliament already antagonistic toward the colonies to pass the TOWNSHEND ACTS. These levied new and different taxes on the American colonists: duties to be collected at the ports on incoming lead, paper, tea, paint, and glass. Besides meeting other imperial expenses such as the upkeep of the army in America, these Townshend duties might go to pay the salaries of royal governors and other crown officials who previously had been paid by the colonial assemblies, which had used this power of the purse to make the king's appointees somewhat responsive to their wishes. A final Townshend scheme reorganized the customs service in America, establishing its headquarters in Boston, where mounting friction between collectors and townspeople led to the dispatch of regular troops to the city to keep order in 1768.

### Resistance and Retaliation

The new tensions subsided into a three-year period of calm beginning in 1770, but only because a second round of American reprisals against English trade prompted the removal of all the Townshend duties save the one on tea, which was retained to show symbolically that Parliament had not renounced its right to tax America. Additionally, the British troops, popularly known as "redcoats," had been withdrawn from Boston following the embarrassing and unplanned BOSTON MASSACRE (1770). Unfortunately for the empire, those years were not used to bring about permanent agreements between Americans and Britons on such subjects as the constitutional relationship between the colonies and the mother country and what might be a reasonable way for the provinces to share the costs of imperial administration. In an atmosphere of continuing suspicion and distrust, each side looked for the worst from the other. Instead of rescinding the remaining Townshend tax and exploring inoffensive methods of aiding the financially troubled British East India Company, Parliament enacted the Tea Act of 1773, designed to allow the company to bypass middlemen and sell directly to American retailers. It was hardly a plot to persuade Americans to drink taxed tea at a low price, but the colonists interpreted it in that fashion. Everywhere there was opposition to landing the dutied brew, and in the Massachusetts capital the famous BOSTON TEA PARTY resulted in the destruction by patriots of 340 tea chests on ships in the harbor.

Parliament's retaliation against Massachusetts was swift and severe: the so-called INTOLERABLE ACTS closed the port of Boston, altered town and provincial government, permitted royal officials and functionaries to go to Britain for trial for any alleged crimes, and provided for the quartering of troops once again in Boston. The other colonies rallied to the defense of Massachusetts in a CONTINENTAL CONGRESS that met in Philadelphia in September 1774 and denounced the acts. Already some colonial leaders were arguing that the old federal conception of the empire would no longer protect American rights and liberties, for Britain had demonstrated its unwillingness to let the colonists manage their own internal, domestic affairs. Now, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and other writers claimed that the empire should properly be viewed as one in which each colony was the equal of England in all respects, that the only tie with Britain was through the king. Here, in sum, was the COMMONWEALTH idea of the 20th century, which now unites such nations as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia with Britain, an idea then rejected by England.

### Lexington and Concord

War clouds were gathering rapidly. The sending of more than 3,000 British army regulars under Maj. Gen. Thomas GAGE to Boston further exacerbated the imperial rift. When a column of these troops under Lt. Col. Francis Smith moved into the countryside to collect arms and munitions gathered by the patriot militia, hostilities erupted at Lexington and Concord on Apr. 19, 1775. Soon afterward militia contingents from places throughout New England took up positions outside Boston, putting the city under siege. Forts TICONDEROGA and CROWN POINT in upstate New York fell to other rebel parties. The misnamed Battle of Bunker Hill was fought on Breed's Hill across from Boston (June 17, 1775). Although Gage's units dislodged the rebels from their advanced positions threatening the city, the British casualties came to 42 percent of the 2,500 redcoats engaged, their heaviest losses of the war. The Second Continental Congress, then meeting at Philadelphia, took control of the New England forces opposing Gage. The lawmakers chose as commander of this "Continental Army" George Washington, a

43-year-old delegate from Virginia, a planter and a ranking militia officer in the French and Indian Wars.

## RESOURCES OF THE OPPONENTS

Britain seemingly had enormous advantages in a war against its colonies. It possessed a well-established government, a sizable treasury, a competent army, the most powerful navy in the world, and a large LOYALIST population in the colonies. By contrast, the American rebels had no chief executive such as the king, nor a cabinet whose members had assigned responsibilities. In fact, the Americans had no separate or independent departments of government such as war, treasury, and foreign affairs until near the end of the conflict. The Continental Congress itself had as its rivals the 13 state legislatures, which often chose not to cooperate with their delegates in Philadelphia. Indeed, Congress was an extralegal body, existing at the pleasure of the states before the Articles of Confederation were ratified in 1781.

### American Advantages

The Americans, however, were not without their own advantages. A vast reservoir of manpower could be drawn upon. For the most part, men preferred short-term enlistments—and many who served came out for a few weeks or months—but they did serve: the best estimates are that over 200,000 participated on the patriot side. General Washington was often short of shoes and powder, but rarely were he and other commanders without men when they needed them most, although at times American leaders had to take into the army slaves, pardoned criminals, British deserters, and prisoners of war. Moreover, Americans owned guns, and they knew how to use them. If the Continental Army won few fixed battles, it normally fought reasonably well; it extracted a heavy toll on the enemy, who usually could not easily obtain reinforcements. Although only Washington and Maj. Gen. Nathanael GREENE were outstanding commanders, many others were steady and reliable, including Henry KNOX, Benjamin LINCOLN, Anthony WAYNE, Daniel MORGAN, Baron von STEUBEN, the Marquis de LAFAYETTE, and Benedict ARNOLD, before he defected to the enemy in 1780.

The Americans also were fighting on their own soil and consequently could be more flexible in their military operations than their opponents. Washington and other Continental Army commanders usually followed the principle of concentration, that is, meeting the enemy in force wherever British armies appeared. In the interior, however, against bands of Loyalists and isolated British outposts and supply trains, the American militia not infrequently employed guerrilla or partisan tactics with striking successes. The major contribution of the militia was to control the home front against the Revolution's internal enemies—whether Indians or Loyalists—while the Continental Army contended with British armies in the eastern or coastal regions in more formalized warfare.

### British Disadvantages

British advantages were steadily negated by the vastness of the struggle, by waging war 3,000 miles from Europe against an armed population spread over hundreds of miles, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, from Maine to Georgia. The land was forested, ravined, swampy, and interlaced by myriad streams and rivers. It was discouraging to win battle after battle and see Britain's armies bled of men and supplies in the process, while the beaten rebels always bounced back. It was equally frustrating to seize at one time or another every American urban center and yet have nothing more to show for it than the mere possession of territory, since the Americans had no single vital strategic center.

To the British it seemed to take forever—6 to 12 weeks—for word of campaign strategies to pass from London to commanders in the field, for provisions to arrive, and for naval squadrons to appear in time for cooperation with land forces. The scope of the contest also reduced the Royal Navy's effectiveness in blockading the long American coastline. Stores could be landed at too many rivers, bays, and inlets. Nor could the British employ their fast frigates and formidable ships of the line (battleships of the 18th century) against an American fleet. The patriots took to the sea in single ships, either privateers or vessels commissioned by Congress. Consequently, the British-American naval war can be told largely as a story of individual ship duels. The triumph of John Paul JONES in the Bonhomme Richard over H.M.S. Serapis in the North Sea in 1779 was the most famous of these encounters.

Britain faced a further problem with the nature of its leadership, both civilian and military. King GEORGE III was a conscientious but supremely obstinate monarch whose reluctance to countenance the loss of the colonies probably resulted in a prolongation of the war. However, responsibility for the conduct of the war was not in his hands but in those of his compliant chief minister, Lord NORTH. North, a dull, unimaginative politician, headed a ministry of undistinguished men. Into the leadership vacuum left by North's weakness stepped Lord George GERMAIN, who

increasingly assumed the direction of military operations in the colonies. Germain, the colonial secretary, was himself a veteran soldier, intelligent and able; he was also, however, an unappealing man, sharp-tongued and aloof, hardly the minister capable of unifying the country and playing a symbolic role as the popular William PITT the Elder had done in the Seven Years' War.

Unfortunately for Britain, its generals in the field were much like the political leaders at home, possessed of average talents at best. John BURGOYNE, Guy CARLETON, Sir Henry CLINTON, Charles CORNWALLIS, William HOWE, and Thomas Gage were probably reasonably endowed to fight conventional wars on the plains of western Europe, where orthodox linear formations were in order. Eighteenth-century European generals, however, were scarcely professionals in a modern sense. Military education was apprenticeship training in the field rather than schooling at such institutions as the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst or its U.S. equivalent at West Point, which were created later. Officers lacked a body of strategic doctrine from which to choose between alternatives for practical application. The British generals revealed themselves grossly inept at improvisation in a unique struggle in America that demanded rapid movement, original tactics, winter campaigning, and—most important—contending with a people in arms. Moreover, some British commanders, notably the Howe brothers, were deliberately slow in prosecuting the war because they favored a political reconciliation with the rebels.

For all these reasons American generals, even with amateurish militia backgrounds, were not at so serious a disadvantage as they might have been in a subsequent period of history. American officers who had fought with the British army in the French and Indian Wars, observing its procedures and reading the standard military treatises, found in the Revolution that the pattern of warfare as practiced by the so-called experts had hardly changed at all. Washington and his comrades lacked experience in directing massive formations and planning campaigns; but, for that matter, British generals—and admirals too—had themselves been subordinate officers in the last war with France.

## COURSE OF THE WAR

Britain was slow to take the offensive in the opening rounds of the war, since most of its troops in America were at Boston, which continued under siege. Unable to break out of their entrenchments, and threatened by Washington's artillery on Dorchester Heights, British troops evacuated the city by sea in March 1776 and established themselves temporarily at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

### Clinton's Southern Expedition

That same spring a small British expedition under Sir Henry Clinton sailed along the coast of the southern colonies in the hope of arousing the Loyalists against the newly established American governments in the Carolinas and Georgia. Reaching the Cape Fear River in North Carolina, Clinton learned that a Loyalist uprising had been smashed by the patriots at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge near Wilmington (Feb. 27, 1776). Then, continuing southward, Clinton's fleet bombarded the harbor fortifications at Charleston, S.C., perhaps seeking to establish a coastal base for local Loyalists. In any case, the expedition was beaten off (June 28, 1776), terminating important British activity in the South for over two years.

### Invasion of Canada

At best, both sides might consider the first year of conflict a draw. Although the king's regiments had withdrawn from New England, the colonists in turn had failed to capture the former French province of Quebec. The Americans had hoped to persuade the French inhabitants to join their cause, since they feared that Canada might become a staging area for an invasion of the thirteen colonies. An American army under Brig. Gen. Richard MONTGOMERY advanced from upper New York and seized Montreal (Nov. 10, 1775), while Col. Benedict Arnold led a second force northward through the Maine wilderness. Uniting before the city of Quebec, they attacked the walled capital but were beaten back, and Montgomery was killed (December 30). Although the Americans continued to blockade the city until May 1776, the only serious American threat to Canada in the war had been ended.

### Britain's Northern Offensive of 1776

From the summer of 1776 the strategic initiative was taken by the British, who believed that the real core of the insurrection was in the northern tier of colonies, especially in New England. To bring the war to an end in 1776, British planners sent reinforcements to Maj. Gen. Guy Carleton, governor of Quebec, who had already defeated Arnold and Montgomery. Carleton should push the Americans from their remaining footholds in Canada and

pursue them down the Lake Champlain-Hudson River trough, which might be a means of cutting the colonies in half. Simultaneously, a much larger army headed by Maj. Gen. William Howe, who had replaced Gage as supreme commander, should capture New York City and its splendid harbor, a strategic base from which it could advance up the Hudson, unite with Carleton, and overrun New England. But Carleton, after driving his opponents back, was delayed by problems of supply and the difficulties of wilderness campaigning. Then, near Valcour Island on Lake Champlain, his naval complement was checkmated by a tiny American fleet hastily assembled by Benedict Arnold. Time was always of the essence in fall campaigning, and the lateness of the season now prompted Carleton to return to Canada for the winter.

Howe's chances of completing his part of the two-pronged offensive seemed more promising than Carleton's. Howe launched his campaign with the largest force he or any other British general had at his disposal during the war: 32,000 soldiers, together with 400 transports and 73 warships under his brother, Vice Admiral Richard, Earl HOWE, with whom he shared the American supreme command. From a military viewpoint, Washington should not have attempted to retain New York City, with its hard-to-defend islands, rivers, bays, and inlets, although Congress saw strong psychological reasons for holding a major city whose loss might dispirit patriots everywhere. As it was, Washington suffered a defeat on Long Island (Aug. 27, 1776). Fortunately for him, Howe did not attempt to follow up his victory quickly. The explanation may be that the Howe brothers, who were also peace commissioners, hoped to convince the Americans to lay down their arms, apparently in the belief that leniency might encourage the rebels to do so. If that was their theory, it failed. Washington fought a series of rearguard actions with Howe on Manhattan Island, with the result that it took the sluggish Howe from August to November to clear his opponents from New York City and the surrounding area. Howe, like Carleton, never made his move along the Hudson, but contented himself with pursuing the retreating Washington across New Jersey until the Americans managed to escape over the Delaware River into Pennsylvania (Dec. 7, 1776).

#### Battles of Trenton and Princeton

With the Revolution seemingly at its nadir and desperately in need of a lift, Washington unexpectedly struck back, showing a determination and a persistence that were to be his hallmarks during a war that lasted eight and a half years, the longest in American history before Vietnam. Washington noted that Howe, in characteristic European fashion, preferred to avoid winter campaigning and had divided his army between New York City and various New Jersey towns. Collecting scattered regulars and militiamen, the Virginian returned to New Jersey and in a little more than a week of dazzling maneuvers captured the garrison of German mercenaries at Trenton (Dec. 26, 1776) and routed another enemy contingent at Princeton (Jan. 3, 1777).

#### The Failure of Negotiation

Just as the Howe brothers had failed in 1776 to crush the rebellion, so also had they failed in their efforts as peace commissioners. They had little with which to negotiate, except the vague assertion that Americans should lay down their arms and trust to the good will of Parliament to remove objectionable laws. Even had they possessed meaningful bargaining powers, the possibility for a reconciliation was probably a thing of the past, since the Americans had already chosen to sever permanently their imperial ties. Fortified by the arguments in the highly influential pamphlet *Common Sense* by Thomas PAINE, the Continental Congress had voted on July 4, 1776, to separate the American colonies from Britain, adopting the immortal words of Thomas Jefferson in the DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

#### Saratoga Campaign

Once again in 1777, British campaign planning focused on the northern states. Once again, too, the Canadian-based army and Howe's forces were to mount offensives. This time the Canadian troops, now commanded by Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne, were numerically much stronger, but they had no promise of cooperation from General Howe as they proceeded down the Lake Champlain-Hudson River course. For his part, Howe appeared uncertain for several months about his own course of action. Possibly he still longed for a negotiated peace; perhaps he was becoming doubtful of Britain's ability to win an exhausting land war. Finally, Howe resolved not to march north in support of Burgoyne but rather to leave a garrison under Sir Henry Clinton in New York City and to transport his army by sea for a strike against Philadelphia. Incredibly, neither Howe nor Burgoyne had corresponded with each other about the campaign—each would handle his own affairs. Even so, the greatest fault lay with Lord George Germain, who had approved the campaign but failed to give it a unifying concept.

Burgoyne's operation began well, as was true of most British campaigning during the Revolution. The American

Northern army, plagued by shortages and internal divisions, initially offered slight opposition. So confident was Burgoyne that he permitted officers to bring wives and mistresses, sanctioned elaborate dinner parties and heavy drinking bouts, and behaved generally—as did his officers—as if war were romantic and glamorous, as indeed it was for European aristocrats of that age. Events were to show that Burgoyne suffered from overconfidence, which actually increased when he recaptured Fort Ticonderoga (July 5, 1777) at the juncture of Lakes Champlain and George. His leisurely pace allowed the Americans precious time to regroup and to make an ally of the dense wilderness of upper New York. They destroyed his only road south, felling trees to block his progress, and sent out guerrilla bands to harass his flanks and lines of communication.

In mid-August Burgoyne learned that one of his units commanded by Lt. Col. Barry ST. LEGER had been mauled by American militia under Nicholas HERKIMER while laying siege to Fort Stanwix in the Mohawk Valley, and that St. Leger had returned to Canada. More bad news came from Bennington, Vt., where a contingent of his German troops in search of packhorses and provisions had been routed by the militia of Brig. Gen. John STARK. At length, Burgoyne reached the rugged Bemis Heights on the west bank of the Hudson, where he collided with a well-entrenched and much-revitalized Northern army under Gen. Horatio GATES, ably supported by Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold and Col. Daniel Morgan. Twice—on September 19 and October 7—Burgoyne lunged at the American lines, and both times was driven back with heavy losses. With his southward progress blocked and no help forthcoming from Clinton in New York, he surrendered at Saratoga (Oct. 17, 1777).

### British Capture of Philadelphia

Howe, meanwhile, was winning victories in Pennsylvania, although their long-term value was more illusory than real. He was faulted, from the very beginning of the campaign, by Sir Henry Clinton for not advancing up the Hudson to aid Burgoyne or at least marching on Philadelphia by land in order to remain in touch with the Canadian army. Instead of debarking at Delaware Bay near his objective, he landed on upper Chesapeake Bay, 92 km (57 mi) from Philadelphia.

Washington, amazed at Howe's desertion of Burgoyne, hurried south from Morristown, N.J., and positioned his army astride Brandywine Creek to parry his opponent's obvious thrust at Philadelphia. But on September 11, in several hours of furious fighting, Washington's right flank collapsed, and he hastily withdrew.

Soon after the British commander entered the patriot capital, causing Congress to flee, Washington made a night assault on the enemy's advance base at Germantown, Pa., but his plan was probably too complicated for his troops, who nonetheless fought well until they were forced to retire (October 4).

The year 1777 had seen another British failure to crush the rebellion. While one army had been lost, another had occupied Philadelphia. However, the city itself was hardly a staggering loss for the Americans, whose armies were still intact. Howe, too, had paid a heavy price in casualties, whereas the patriots were able to replenish their own depleted ranks.

### THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

The new year, 1778, was a time of transition in the Revolutionary War because of Britain's inability to win in the northern colonies and because of the increasing part played by France. The French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, eager to settle an old score with Britain, convinced his royal master Louis XVI to permit France to funnel secret aid to the patriots in 1776 and 1777. That aid took the form of the government's handing over munitions, arms, and clothing to the playwright Caron de BEAUMARCHAIS and his fake "Hortalez and Company," which in turn arranged with Benjamin Franklin and other patriot commissioners in Paris to have them shipped across the Atlantic.

Vergennes, however, was not willing to risk war with Britain until he was sure that the Americans had the ability to continue the fight and the commitment to eschew reconciliation with George III. Gates's victory at Saratoga, combined with rumors that Britain would offer America major concessions in return for peace, finally pushed France over the brink. Formal treaties of commerce and alliance were signed by American and French diplomats on Feb. 6, 1778. France became the first nation to recognize the infant country; it renounced all claims to North America east of the Mississippi River and agreed with the United States that neither would lay down its arms until American independence was guaranteed. Already Spain, a French ally, was giving America modest aid. It declared war on Britain in 1779, but without joining the United States in a formal alliance.

### Valley Forge and the Battle of Monmouth



The winter of the signing of the French alliance was also the Continental Army's time of cruel suffering at VALLEY FORGE, although it was actually not the worst winter of the war. Spring brought Washington not only new recruits, but also an army better trained than ever before, due in considerable part to the labors of the Prussian general Baron von Steuben in drilling the troops at Valley Forge.

Spring meant, furthermore, additional pressure on British forces in the New World now that France was entering the struggle. Accordingly, Sir Henry Clinton, who became the new commander in chief when the Howes resigned (May 1778) and returned to England, now received important orders: evacuate his army from Philadelphia, concentrate his forces at New York City, and send men to guard against French threats against British islands in the Caribbean.

Washington, his confidence up, pursued Clinton on his cross-country march through New Jersey, and at Monmouth Courthouse the two armies clashed (June 28, 1778). For the Continentals, who traded volley for volley with the finest soldiers in Europe, it was a moral victory, although the outcome itself was indecisive. In three years of fighting, Britain had little to show for its exertions to regain America, and so it would remain in the northern states, where the heavy campaigning was at an end. Washington, who followed Clinton northward after Monmouth, spent the next three years observing the British from lines outside New York City.

### War in the West

In one sense, the struggle on the western frontier paralleled the fighting to the east, in that neither side managed to get the upper hand. To be sure, most Indian tribes that involved themselves in the fray did so in the cause of the "great white father," George III. They had long nourished grievances against the colonists, who had cheated them in land transactions and trade. But it is not clear that the aid of the tribesmen was a positive influence for Britain; their ferocious tactics may well have alienated many colonists who had been neutral or apathetic. Furthermore, because they demanded food in winter and a great variety of other goods and supplies, the Indians were a great financial and administrative burden for British frontier leaders.

Although Kentucky settlers were threatened periodically, in 1778 the young George Rogers CLARK weakened Britain's hold on the interior by overrunning enemy-controlled villages in present-day Illinois and Indiana. He also captured the controversial lieutenant governor of Detroit, Henry Hamilton, the alleged "hair-buyer." Less significant was the role of the Kentuckian Daniel BOONE, a steady if unspectacular leader. Elsewhere in the West the contest seesawed back and forth. In the lower South the Cherokee proved to be the most formidable of Britain's warrior allies; although the patriot militia handed them a series of stinging defeats in 1776, the Cherokee continued to be troublesome, if not a serious threat. To check the devastating raids of the Iroquois on the New York-Pennsylvania frontier, Washington sent a striking force headed by Maj. Gen. John SULLIVAN into western New York, where the Americans laid waste to many tribal towns.

Even so, Sullivan, Clark, and the American commanders of the Western Department at Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh) could not eliminate all the anchor points of British power in the interior. Loyalist and Indian parties based in Detroit and Niagara continued to harass the frontier communities along the Ohio and in the valleys of western New York even after the conclusion of the war, thus contributing to the renewal of war between Britain and the United States in 1812.

### War in the South

In the South, a region long neglected by Britain, the war reached its conclusion. Because of the British inability to prevail in the North, London's strategists gradually shifted their attention to the South, beginning in late 1778. They felt that section contained a higher percentage of Loyalists than any other part of America. Then, too, if choices had to be made after France's entry into the war had stretched British resources tissue thin, England preferred to save the South above all other areas. Its raw materials were the most valuable of all American commodities in the mother country's mercantile scheme.

Britain, as usual, opened a new theater of campaigning with a string of triumphs. In December 1778 small British expeditions from New York and Florida subdued Georgia. Fighting in 1779 was inconclusive along the Georgia-South Carolina border, and a combined Franco-American assault on British-held Savannah was beaten off. In February 1780 Britain greatly expanded its southern beachhead when Sir Henry Clinton arrived in South Carolina from New York with 8,700 additional troops. He soon laid siege to Charleston, where on May 12 American Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln surrendered the city and its more than 5,000 defenders. A second, hastily



assembled American Southern army under Horatio Gates was crushed at Camden in upper South Carolina (Aug. 16, 1780) by Lord Cornwallis, whom Clinton had left in command when he returned to New York.

These English victories did not extinguish the flames of rebellion. Britain found pacification of the back country difficult. Rebel small-unit operations continued under such local, legendary guerrilla leaders as Francis MARION and Thomas SUMTER. And a body of patriot frontiersmen, mainly from the Watauga settlements in present-day eastern Tennessee, wiped out a 1,000-man contingent of Loyalist troops at King's Mountain on the border of the Carolinas (Oct. 7, 1780).

As the guerrillas tied down Cornwallis, still a third American army formed in the South under Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, who then launched the most effective military campaign of the war. Greene's basic plan was to keep his numerically superior antagonist, Cornwallis, off balance by a series of rapid movements and by cooperating with the South Carolina guerrilla leaders. Greene audaciously divided his small army, sending Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan into western South Carolina, where he destroyed Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton's Tory Legion at Cowpens (Jan. 17, 1781). When Cornwallis pursued Morgan, Greene united his army, led Cornwallis on an exhausting chase into North Carolina, and finally fought him to a draw at Guilford Courthouse (Mar. 15, 1781). While the British general limped eastward and then northward to the Virginia coast, the resourceful Greene returned to South Carolina, and between April and July picked off, one by one, every British post save Charleston and Savannah, where the enemy remained isolated and impotent until peace came.

Cornwallis, meanwhile, was sealing his own fate in Virginia, where he united with a raiding expedition under Benedict Arnold (now in British service), already in that state, and erected a base at the port of Yorktown. Both his superior, Clinton, in New York and General Washington recognized that Cornwallis was vulnerable to a land-and-sea blockade on a Virginia peninsula. But Cornwallis refused to leave, arguing the doubtful proposition that Britain would have to capture Virginia in order to have lasting success in the lower South.

At this point, Franco-American army and naval operations, hitherto disappointing in their results, now determined the fate of Cornwallis. Adding to his forces the French troops of the Comte de ROCHAMBEAU in Rhode Island, Washington raced southward and opened siege operations before Yorktown on October 6, while a French fleet under the Comte de GRASSE sealed off a sea escape. Clinton hastened a naval squadron from New York to the Chesapeake, but it was repulsed by de Grasse. After suffering through an intensive artillery bombardment, Cornwallis, on Oct. 19, 1781, surrendered his nearly 8,000 troops to the 17,000-man allied force. The British failed in the South for several reasons, including an exaggerated estimate of Loyalist support, an inadequate program of pacification, and a failure to recognize the significance of sea power.

### Conclusion

The war in America rapidly ground to a halt after Yorktown, a war in which neither side had seemingly the energy or the resources to obtain a total victory. Certainly British leaders had lost all enthusiasm for subduing America, although Britain and its European enemies, France and Spain, continued to duel on far-flung battlefronts until the conclusion of peace in 1783.

The struggle had been so unusual that contemporary military thinkers believed that no European nation would ever have to engage in the kind of conflict that Britain had confronted in America between 1775 and 1783. England had dispatched 60,000 soldiers across an ocean to fight a prolonged war in an alien environment against a people who were numerous and armed. It was a task never paralleled in the past.

As for the Americans, if they won no clear-cut military victory, if they could not drive out the British completely, if Clinton's forces continued after Yorktown to occupy important cities and interior posts, they nonetheless scored a decisive triumph at the peace conference in Paris. Taking advantage of suspicions between the European rivals and sensing England's desire to be generous in order to pry America out of the French orbit, John JAY and Benjamin Franklin secured not only British recognition of American independence but also the entire region from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River as part of the United States. The final Treaty of Paris was signed on Sept. 3, 1783, and ratified by the Continental Congress on Jan. 14, 1784.

### POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS

The Revolution involved more than battles and diplomacy. If those were the most crucial and immediate objectives, more important long-term goals and purposes were to be met; for this was a constructive, not a negative revolution. If Americans broke a relationship characterized by colonialism and monarchy, that was about

the extent of their destructive activity. They still respected British institutions, which they felt had been abused and corrupted by politicians around George III. Consequently, in fashioning their own state institutions—a process that began in the summer of 1776—they usually employed familiar British-American bricks and mortar.

The British constitution was unwritten, but the Americans spelled out the responsibilities and limits of government in written charters. Since their governments rested totally on the consent of the people, they were designated as republican in character. Basic liberties could not be abrogated by government under any pretext. They were defined in bills of rights, which included freedom of the press, right of petition, trial by jury, habeas corpus, and other procedures that came to be known as due process of law.

The direct involvement of the people in government was increased in other ways. Governors were elected, not appointed; both branches of the legislatures were elected directly or indirectly by the citizens. Obviously, special privilege had no place in a republic. Consequently, several states forbade the passage of any office from one man to another by ties of blood. North Carolina's constitution echoed words found in other political parchments when it proclaimed that "no hereditary emoluments, privileges or honors ought to be granted or conferred by this state."

### **Institutional Changes**

The Americans were primarily about a political revolution when they cast off their imperial links and tailored independent governments. Moreover, a revolution coupled with a foreign war is hardly a time for thoughtful social experimentation, especially when—in the case of the Americans—men believed that they already lived in a remarkably free and open society. Some Americans, however—filled with such Enlightenment ideas as that society's institutions should be judged critically in terms of their usefulness to mankind—stirred somewhat uneasily. They acknowledged certain contradictions between their revolutionary theories and their practices.

To be sure, some institutional inequities, such as anachronistic inheritance laws and established churches that received preferential treatment, had been eroded or undermined by the degree of liberty and opportunity that existed everywhere in the twilight years of the colonial era. But during the Revolution, Americans took specific action that resulted in the abolition of primogeniture and entail; in the South the Anglican church lost its already weakened privileged status, as did the Congregational church in New England some years later. Virginia, as was so often true in the Revolution, led the way with its famous Statute of Religious Freedom (1786). An outstanding document of the age, it proclaimed that "no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship" nor "suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief," nor would his "civil capacities" be affected by any "matters of religion."

### **The Spirit of Progress**

If Americans of the Revolutionary generation did not level the social order, or did not create democracy in its present form, they laid the basic groundwork. Furthermore, the revolutionists elevated the American spirit. They conveyed to their fellow citizens the notion that the country would grow and expand. In opening new lands in the West, they shaped an orderly process by which frontier territories would move from colonial status to statehood; moreover, the infant states would not be inferior to the original states, as had been true of the earlier relationship between the thirteen colonies and Great Britain. Freed from the mercantilism of the old colonial system, Americans found fresh outlets for trade and commerce and devised improved methods of banking and corporate organization. They set up new educational institutions, and they advanced the controversial idea that the state had a responsibility for the education of its citizens, an obligation that had traditionally been the preserve of the church.

From all these accomplishments two additional American goals developed. First, a sense of mission—of uniqueness and special purpose—was present in the Revolutionary experience. It was to make America a kind of showcase that would enable people everywhere to see what free people were capable of achieving. The sense of mission was later a powerful catalyst for continuing change, for living up to the principles of the Declaration of Independence. The second goal, relating to self-purification and setting one's own house in order, was the appeal for a distinct American culture. Although such a development occurred only in a limited sense—for Americans have always been a part of Western civilization—it did trigger a new and at least partially fruitful quest for attainments in music, the arts, and literature.

### **Creation of the Constitution**

One final accomplishment of the Revolutionary generation was the creation of a viable national government. Without it, all other gains of the period might have amounted to little. Since that achievement had not taken place

by 1783, the leaders of the time felt that the Treaty of Paris did not mean the end of the American Revolution. As the poet Joel BARLOW explained, "The revolution is but half completed. Independence and government were the two objects contended for; and but one is yet obtained."

The task of preparing a constitution for the new nation had begun in 1776 in the Continental Congress, when that body worked to define the relations of the states to one another and to the nation. In doing so, Congress found that the old colonial jealousies still existed, as did the suspicions of remote, centralized authority that had led the colonists to criticize and break their ties with the king and Parliament.

Consequently, the first national constitution, the ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION, was not completed until 1777 and not ratified by all the states until 1781, and it provided for a government of limited national jurisdiction. It was an instrument of one branch, Congress, which now was given legal authority to do what it was already doing in large part in attempting to direct the war effort. Congress was to have exclusive authority over foreign relations, war and peace, weights and measures, admiralty cases, Indian relations outside the boundaries of individual states, and postal services. Congress was crippled in crucial ways, however, especially in obtaining revenues; for it could not tax or levy duties on external commerce, nor did it have legal ways to enforce its legitimate authority if the states chose to disregard its laws.

As the war approached its end, the states displayed less willingness to cooperate with Congress and to support its acts, a trend that grew ominous after the treaty of peace. It was especially depressing to those who had become ardent nationalists through their wartime experiences to see the states ignore the Articles of Confederation by making treaties with the Indians and building state navies, or by failing to send representatives to Congress and neglecting to contribute sums for the support of the Confederation government. To nationalists such as Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Henry Knox, and others, a new political system altogether was needed, particularly because all efforts to amend the articles had failed. To that end, the CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, which met at Philadelphia in 1787, decided to try a different form of government—one that would ensure the rights of the states and at the same time provide the country with a central government capable of maintaining domestic tranquillity, preserving individual liberty, providing for the common defense, and raising the status of America in the family of nations.

The result was the federal CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, which was approved by the states in ratifying conventions in 1788, despite the cries of opponents that such a powerful government would tyrannize the states and their citizens. The new constitution was federal, in that powers were separated and divided between the national and state governments, both with their own jurisdictions. By turning to federalism the 55 men at Philadelphia solved what had been the central problem of American political history in the quarter century since the end of the French and Indian War, namely, how governmental power should be allocated. First, the question was between Parliament and the colonial assemblies; later, between Congress under the Articles of Confederation and the state legislatures. The American Revolution reached its culmination when the Constitution was adopted in 1788.

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See also: BRANDYWINE, BATTLE OF THE; BUNKER HILL, BATTLE OF; COWPENS, BATTLE OF; LEXINGTON AND CONCORD, BATTLES OF; LONG ISLAND, BATTLE OF; MONMOUTH, BATTLE OF; PARIS, TREATIES OF; SARATOGA, BATTLES OF; TRENTON, BATTLE OF; YORKTOWN CAMPAIGN.